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EXCHANGE OF LETTERS DATED 25 AND 26 JULY 1961 BETWEEN THE SECRETARY-  
GENERAL AND THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF FRANCE

(a) Message dated 25 July 1961 from the Secretary-General addressed to the  
Minister for Foreign Affairs of France

By cable dated Saturday, 22 July 1961, I informed you of the interim resolution adopted by the Security Council. Although I have received no reply, you have, I am sure, given your urgent attention to this decision and to the obligations for both parties deriving from it.

During the debate, the French representative informed the Council of the French Government's order for a cease-fire. If I understood the French attitude rightly, this order was not regarded by the French Government as having been taken in compliance with the Council's decision, but as an action indicated by the position already established by the French forces. Apart from this information, no official communication from the French Government on the action taken by France to carry out the resolution had reached me before my departure from New York on Sunday evening, and I have not received any indication that such information was transmitted to the United Nations later.

Upon my arrival here yesterday afternoon, I was informed by the Tunisian authorities of efforts to establish contact between Tunisian and French representatives with a view to enabling the resolution to be carried out. I note that no such contact has yet been established at Bizerta, but that after contact had been made in the south of Tunisia at the initiative of the French, the Tunisian authorities withdrew their armed forces, as the resolution requests, to the positions they held before the crisis.

The present situation at Bizerta causes me the most serious concern in view of the fact that, more than two days after the Security Council's decision, no progress has been reported regarding the withdrawal of armed forces requested by the Council as an essential sequel to the cease-fire itself.

In view of the responsibilities incumbent upon the Secretary-General for the execution of this resolution, as of any other decision by the Security Council or the General Assembly, I consider it my duty to explore the possibilities of improving this disturbing situation by making an effort, at least, to establish immediately the necessary contact between the two parties, the basis for which must obviously be strict compliance with the terms of the resolution and respect for Tunisian sovereignty.

Having heard the Tunisian authorities' account of the situation, I should now like to have corresponding information on the French attitude regarding the conditions under which the necessary contact can take place and its immediate purpose. I should be grateful for any relevant information which you could send me forthwith. I hope to be able to take advantage of my stay in Tunisia to initiate full implementation of the resolution on the basis indicated above.

You will share, I am sure, my strong desire to see the present situation, with all the serious risks it entails, develop in a favourable direction, with the Security Council decision as the natural point of departure which must be given stability through the speedy fulfilment of the resolution's terms.

I have the honour to be, etc.

(Signed) Dag HAMMARSKJOLD

Tunis, 25 July 1961

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(b) Letter dated 26 July from the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France  
addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to acknowledge receipt of the letter dated 25 July which you sent to me from Tunis, where you now are at the invitation of the President of the Tunisian Republic. This letter, which appears to me to set out the views of the Tunisian Government, deals with a resolution adopted on 22 July by the Security Council, in which an appeal was made to the French Government and to the Tunisian Government to agree to a cease-fire, although, as you know, the French forces had achieved the objectives assigned to them and the French Authorities, since the commencement of the fighting, had been proposing that it should be brought to an end.

The French Government has decided to issue a statement clarifying the facts with which you are concerned.

For your information I am enclosing the text of this document, which is to be published.

I have the honour to be, etc.

(Signed) COUVE de MURVILLE

ANNEX

The following information is communicated by the French Government concerning the conditions in which the cease-fire was carried out at Bizerta and in the Sahara and, in addition, concerning the manner in which normal conditions should be restored.

From the very start of the measures of force taken by the Tunisian Government against the base of Bizerta, the French Government, in a note dated 20 July, offered the Tunisian Government a cease-fire and the necessary contacts between the authorities on both sides to implement the cease-fire. For three days the Tunisian Government did not see fit to reply to this offer even though it had been unceasingly repeated in the name of the French Government. On the contrary, in the statement that the Tunisian representative made in the Security Council on 21 July, he refused to accept any idea of a cease-fire so long as the French Government did not agree to the principle of the evacuation of the base, which was in no way stipulated in the Franco-Tunisian agreements now in effect.

When the operations made inevitable at Bizerta by the Tunisian action were ended on the afternoon of 22 July, the French Government made it known that it had given the necessary orders to cease fire except in the event of a further attack by Tunisian forces. That same evening the Admiral in command of the Bizerta base renewed the offer of a cease-fire to the Tunisian authorities at Bizerta, and this offer was then accepted.

The offer by Admiral Amman contained two provisions: to implement an effective cease-fire before the early hours of the morning of the 23rd, and to start talks in the afternoon of the same day with a view to beginning to determine the means of returning to normal conditions. It proved possible to come to a rapid agreement on the cease-fire, and it was effectively applied, at the prescribed time, by both sides. As for the discussions, it has not yet been possible to begin them because the Tunisian authorities have rejected the French proposal to hold them in a building selected by common agreement, as is normal in such cases and in accordance with all international precedents.

The French proposal naturally continues to be valid.

With regard to a return to normal conditions, it should be said that in the Sahara the Tunisian units - which had penetrated by force into French territory, where they were still installed as of 23 July - withdrew on the 24th under pressure from the French command.

At Bizerta, however, the way in which the installations of the base are located and the aggression perpetrated against and still threatening the French forces make it impossible for the cease-fire to be ensured merely by the fact of our forces returning to their former positions. What is needed is a return to peaceful conditions. The state of affairs as it existed on 19 July when the Tunisians began hostilities must not, in any event, be repeated, for as early as 19 July the various installations of the base - surrounded by Tunisian forces and by numerous civilians led by the Tunisian forces - had been cutt off from normal communication among themselves and with the outside. Communications must in future be guaranteed, and the base must be able to function normally, as is now being ensured by the French forces.

The French representative in the Security Council did, moreover, make this specific information known to the Council on 22 July, and the President acknowledged this.

The French Government continues to hope that discussions may be opened between the French and Tunisian authorities in order to settle the situation as soon as possible and by common agreement.

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